



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Great Ape Conservation Fund

The plight of apes has drawn world-wide attention, giving rise to a large, active constituency for their conservation. Once protected by the isolation of densely forested, mostly unexplored habitat, apes now experience increased pressure from human populations encroaching on their world. Expanding road networks furnish access to once remote forests. Increasing human populations demand more resources from the forest—land for cultivation, valuable tropical timber species, diamonds, gold and, most devastating for forest wildlife, the meat from wild animals referred to as bushmeat. In some areas illegal commercial bushmeat operations focus on apes because their meat is the most prized and brings the highest price in far-flung urban markets.

Apes are, by their biological nature, extremely vulnerable species. They have

complex social groupings, mature slowly, and have low reproductive rates. Even slight external pressures can significantly damage ape populations. In 1960, more than one million chimpanzees populated the dense forests of Africa. Today, fewer than 200,000 live there, and their numbers continue to fall at an alarming rate.

The Great Ape Conservation Act of 2000 established the Great Ape Conservation Fund (Fund) to assist in the conservation and protection of five primate groups—chimpanzees, gorillas, bonobos, orangutans, and gibbons.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) works to achieve the objectives of the Fund by developing partnerships with natural resource agencies, academic institutions, local community groups, government and non-government entities, and any other organization



Orangutan
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committed to partnering for the benefit of the world's remaining apes. Together with our partners, we are encouraged by numerous successes in Africa and Asia.

The Fund, administered by the Service's Division of International Conservation, invites proposals supporting long-term conservation, and addressing needs in the areas of research, management, conflict resolution, community outreach, education, law enforcement, and local and national capacity building. The first grants were awarded during the 2001 - 2002 cycle, totaling 45 grants in 17 countries. The following information summarizes conservation achievements by the Fund that benefit these species.

Gibbons

The gibbons (genus *Hylobates*) are 12 small ape species distributed throughout the tropical rain forests of South-East Asia. Among these is the ape species closest to extinction. With fewer than 50 individuals remaining in the wild, the eastern black crested gibbon (*Nomascus* sp. cf. *nasutus*) is fighting to survive in tiny forest fragments in Vietnam and China. Gibbons are threatened by habitat degradation, fragmentation and loss, over-hunting (food, medicine, sport), and illegal trade (pets, medicine). The Fund has supported projects in 8 of the 10 countries in which gibbons occur. These projects address conservation education, surveys, long-term protection, genetic studies, capacity development among protected area managers, and development of alternative incomes in communities prone to poaching.

Orangutan

Orangutans (*Pongo pygmaeus*) are restricted to the islands of Borneo and Sumatra, and live in rain forest habitats ranging from sea-level swamp forests to mountain slopes. They are internationally recognized as endangered species. Their rain forest habitat has declined by more than 80 percent during the past 20 years due to timber extraction and conversion of rain forest for plantations and agriculture. This, when combined with hunting orangutans for meat and killing adult females to obtain infants for the illegal pet trade, has resulted in an estimated decline in the orangutan

population of 30 to 50 percent during the past 10 years. Uncontrolled forest fires have also destroyed significant portions of orangutan habitat in both Sumatra and Borneo. The Fund has supported studies of the ecology, distribution, population dynamics and threats to orangutans in both the Indonesian (Kalimantan) and Malaysian (Sabah) portions of the island of Borneo. It also has supported establishment of protection units in two major habitats in Kalimantan, and conservation education in Kalimantan and Sumatra.

Bonobo

Bonobos, or pygmy chimpanzees (*Pan paniscus*), are thought to share 98.4 percent of the genetic make-up of humans. They live only in remote forests in the west-central portion of the Democratic Republic of Congo, mostly in and around Salonga National Park. Little is known about the species in the wild, which was only discovered by scientists in 1933. Today, hunting for bushmeat is on the rise, and traditional inhibitions on hunting bonobos are breaking down as refugees from the Congolese civil war move into their forest habitats. In response to growing threats to the species, their urgent needs for protection, and data to direct conservation action, the Fund has awarded two recent grants to organizations working closely with the government of the Congo. These grants provide funds to work with villagers living near bonobo habitat; obtain baseline information on bonobo numbers, distribution, and threat status; and build capacity among Congolese biologists and wildlife managers.

Chimpanzee

Chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) have a much wider distribution than bonobos, ranging from Tanzania in the east, across the Congo Basin, and into West Africa as far as Senegal. Part of their range overlaps that of lowland gorillas, but they do not inhabit the same forests as their close relatives, the bonobos. Like the other apes, they suffer from increased poaching for bushmeat, as well as logging and other land uses that compete with them for habitat. The Fund has provided eight grants for projects that address the needs of chimpanzees across Africa. The

projects range from a study and protection effort on a population of "naive chimps" in the northern Congo Republic to bushmeat awareness campaigns and anti-poaching efforts, as well as the development a long-term conservation strategy for West African chimpanzees.

Gorilla

Gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla*) consist of four subspecies living in two discrete areas of Africa. The western portion of their range is near the Gulf of Guinea where approximately 40,000 western lowland gorillas exist mostly in Gabon, Republic of Congo, and southeastern Cameroon. The Cross River Gorilla lives in an isolated region of eastern Nigeria and western Cameroon. These animals are seldom studied and their numbers are unknown. In the eastern part of the species' range, eastern lowland gorillas, or Grauer's gorillas, live in the war-torn eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. An estimated 3,000 remain. The mountain gorilla lives in the Albertine Rift Mountains of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda, where only 670 individuals exist today.

The Fund has awarded 10 grants to gorilla conservation projects in Africa. Examples of these grants include Fauna and Flora International's Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary Cross Mountain Gorilla Project, the International Gorilla Conservation Programme's Ranger-based Monitoring Program in protected areas of the Albertine Rift, and the Wildlife Conservation Society's Gorilla Preventive Health Project, addressing the present Ebola outbreak and its threat to gorillas and humans in Gabon and the Republic of Congo.

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